

The Negro in Slavery Days

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IT was intimated to me that possibly the statement should be, "What were the opportunities for graded-education for the Negroes of the days of slavery?" I cannot acknowledge three score years and ten, or three score years of my distinguished friend, and, therefore, cannot give you the experience that he has offered you this morning. I merely give some suggestions that have been quoted from many of my friends in my city who knew more about the situation than I did.



Hon. N. B. Broughton

I was seventeen years of age when the war between the states closed. The Negroes were not able to read except in special instances. Nor were there any organizations for them, nor were there churches, except a very few, when they were held as property. They belonged, practically, to one denomination. I don't suppose there were twenty-five Negro organizations in my state, North Carolina. I know of no Sunday-schools among the mountain Negroes, and there were no edifices set aside especially for them.

Religious Meetings in Slavery Days

Outdoor meetings were held during the days of slavery, and in some of the white churches there were balconies set apart for the purpose of the worship of the slaves. Sometimes services were held in a house set apart for this purpose. Sometimes chaplains were employed.

Among the Negroes themselves, there were, now and then, able preachers, men who had learned enough to exhort and preach, and some of these were unusually gifted in oratory. These Negroes were often allowed special liberties, and visited nearby plantations and held religious services, and at these religious services, there would be songs sung that were very uplifting and inspiring, and some of the preaching was also.

The results of these efforts were seen in the number of professions and conversions reported, and the influence was in the right direction. Some of the preachers exerted unusual powers.

"Old Samson's" Preaching

I turn aside to relate an instance that occurred in my childhood days of this character. I recall Old Samson, as he was called, who lived on the plantation next to my father's, a white-haired old negro, that everybody loved. He had a great power of eloquence and often the white people would gather at his home where he would have outdoor service, and hear him preach, or exhort, and pray. He had learned the Scriptures by reading to his master, who was a very godly, upright man. He had mastered the Scriptures and he delivered extraordinary sermons. I wish there had been some one there to make a copy, and preserve some of these wonderful exhortations. They even now come to me as I think of them. The old man died some twenty-five years ago.

An Influence over Other Blacks

Many of these Negroes exerted a stronger influence over the other blacks than the whites did. These meetings, conducted by Negro preachers, were always held in the open air. In spite of all these things, it is safe to say that the Negro had but little opportunity to receive religious training during the days of slavery. In most of the white churches, provision was made for seating a few Negroes, and in many of the churches Negroes were received into their membership. However, they never had any part in the government of the church, as far as I can learn.

Members of Negro Churches

At the close of the war, there were many of these Negroes who were members of churches, and who, themselves, formed churches and church organizations that have grown into large denominations that exist to-day. Now, as these suggestions would lead you to infer, it is easy to see that there would not be any very broad or very deep religious training. Without being taught to read, with no knowledge of the Scripture except that told to them or read to them, it was impossible to be broadly trained in any sense of the word. Not having any schools, it was simply the hearing, and the hearing of the few rather than the many. The chaplains or missionaries employed for this purpose did good work, and conscientious work many times, but it was a work that was not generally uplifting or far reaching in its results.

With the passing of the years, conditions improved and religious training broadened. Many church leaders to-day among the Negroes are well versed in the Scriptures and are doing a work productive of large results.